

THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

Soldiers Overcome With Excitement in Their First Engagement, Return to Battle as Calmly as Factory Hands Going to Their Day's Work

There is something in the back recesses of our brains which makes us want to live. No man in his right mind wants to die, and only when the back part of his brain is impaired through grief, worry, sickness or some other profound cause, does he go about regardless of peril.

One of these profound influences is battle. It is said that men in battle will hug the bottom of the trenches because they are taught by military experts to do so, but after the baptism of fire they care for nothing, and will risk their lives to gain comfort.

There are stories going the rounds of fighters in Europe who have left the trenches and walked through a hail of bullets and shells after an overcoat or after food. These men knew nothing about death. They did know a lot about discomfort. They knew when they were thirsty they were terribly uncomfortable. They knew when they were cold they suffered.

When the German cruiser Koenigsberg was driven into a river on the African coast and bottled up there by a superior force of English ships, it is reported that the Ger-

men in the cities going to and from work. A story is told of men high on the top of a sky scraper. One of the workmen felicitated with the other on his good luck in having a safe job on a girder several hundred feet above the street, while others had to risk their lives in Europe.

The majority of the soldiers in Europe would not have changed places with the man on the girder. Men working in the logging camps, where danger is constant, due to lack of inspection by State authorities, feel sorry for the men working in the steel mills amid the molten metal. Men on the sea are glad in time of hurricane that they are not on shore. For, on the sea, they are free to ride on the storm. The men on shore pity the poor devils of the sea.

The recruit getting the baptism of fire is to be pitied. He is probably as brave as any of the other men, but he has not gotten accustomed to the situation, and in horror he hugs the bottom of the trench while the shells scream overhead. But the recruit in time learns not to fear. He becomes hardened to con-



VARIOUS scenes along the firing lines in France and Belgium, showing both calmness and excitement among soldiers under fire.

times. The real heroes are the recruits, for they stay at the front even though they are scared. The seasoned soldiers jest as they fight just as a gang of workmen jest and talk with each other. Fighting is occupation to them.

It is told of a hero in the Spanish-American War who was commissioned a major in the American volunteer army, although he had no previous military experience except at a military school, that as he was going into action at San Juan Hill one of the regular army officers noticed the major's white face and chattering teeth.

"Major, you are scared," the regular said.

"I know it," said the major. "If you were half as scared as I am you would be twenty miles from here."

It is not only the soldiers who showed heroism under fire in Europe. The civilians were heroes as well. In Belgium the farmers were in the midst of harvest when the Uhlans crossed their frontier. The farmers continued harvesting their crops because they realized the armies would trample them under foot. Their only hope was in completing the harvest before the armies crossed the country. They worked amid shot and shell without regard to the enemy. They were

just as safe in the field at work as they were running and they bravely chose the wiser course.

War correspondents tell how they found French women knitting while the fighting was going on. There was nothing for them to do but knit. Then why run? As they knitted they commented on the shots which dropped around them. In Rheims it is told how women near the cathedral counted the shells as they struck that edifice. There is a tale of a soldier in the trenches who was known to everybody as a coward. He always would hug the bottom of the trench. It seemed he never could get over it. But he was passionately fond of cigarettes. One day while the bullets were whistling

above his trench a soldier in a neighboring trench held up cigarettes to him. He jumped up, raced to the other trench and came back triumphantly with the cigarettes. He was unhurt.

More officers are killed in battle in proportion to their numbers than any other class of men. That is due to the risks they insist on taking. That is particularly true in the English Army, where the officers risk their lives needlessly. The Germans would be court-martialed for risking their lives as much as the English officers do. The English say they do it to steady their men and show they are not afraid.

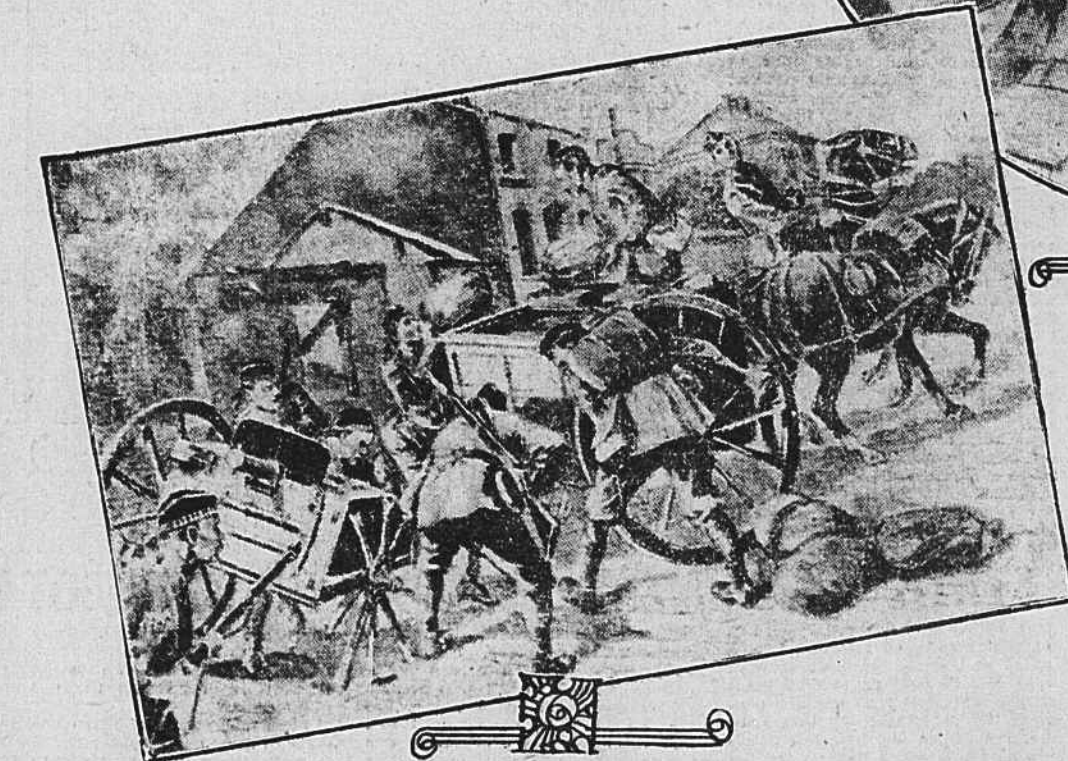
The same is true to a considerable extent in the American Army. The losses of officers in the Spanish-American War was surprisingly great. Of course the Spanish-American War was not on the proportions of this war and the sharpshooters figured extensively. These sharpshooters would pick out the officers to kill.

An officer in our regular army who saw fighting in the Spanish war, pointed out the other day that most persons had a very wrong conception of how soldiers fight in mod-

ern battles. After the scrap was over he became a private once more, but while that row was on, so far as actual influence with the men was concerned, he was of a great deal more importance than his captain. The way that man would wriggle into cover was a revelation and he went through three campaigns without a scratch. His example in the regiment was a big asset.

"There has been much discussion of bravery in battle since the war started. According to my experience it is very much a matter of temperament. Some men are carried along by a sort of ecstacy, others hold themselves to the work by sheer force of will, while others, and these are the best, go through a fight with a sort of grim interest as if it was a highly amusing though somewhat dangerous sport they were engaged in, like polo or football.

"I had an instance of this in the Philippines in the battle at which General Lawton was killed. That was one of the hottest fights I have ever seen. Our men had been ambushed by the Filipinos, who were hidden in great force, while our men



men threw up trenches in the vicinity of the Koenigsberg, from which they fought the British. From their place of security among the palm trees they kept any landing force of marines from getting near them.

Although they were securely entrenched they could not leave the trenches without great risk of life from the bullets of the British marines. Yet when the mosquitoes made night miserable in the trenches one of the Germans left his trench and walked coolly through the hail of bullets to a neighboring trench, where he obtained some pennyroyal, with which to fight the mosquitoes.

Men under fire do not think of the consequences any more than

do lions, just as other men, and laughs with them as he fights.

There was a Captain in a certain Northern army fighting in our Civil War who derided his company of recruits for dodging the bullets. He explained it was too late to dodge after they had heard the bullets whizz over their heads and besides they might dodge their heads into a second bullet.

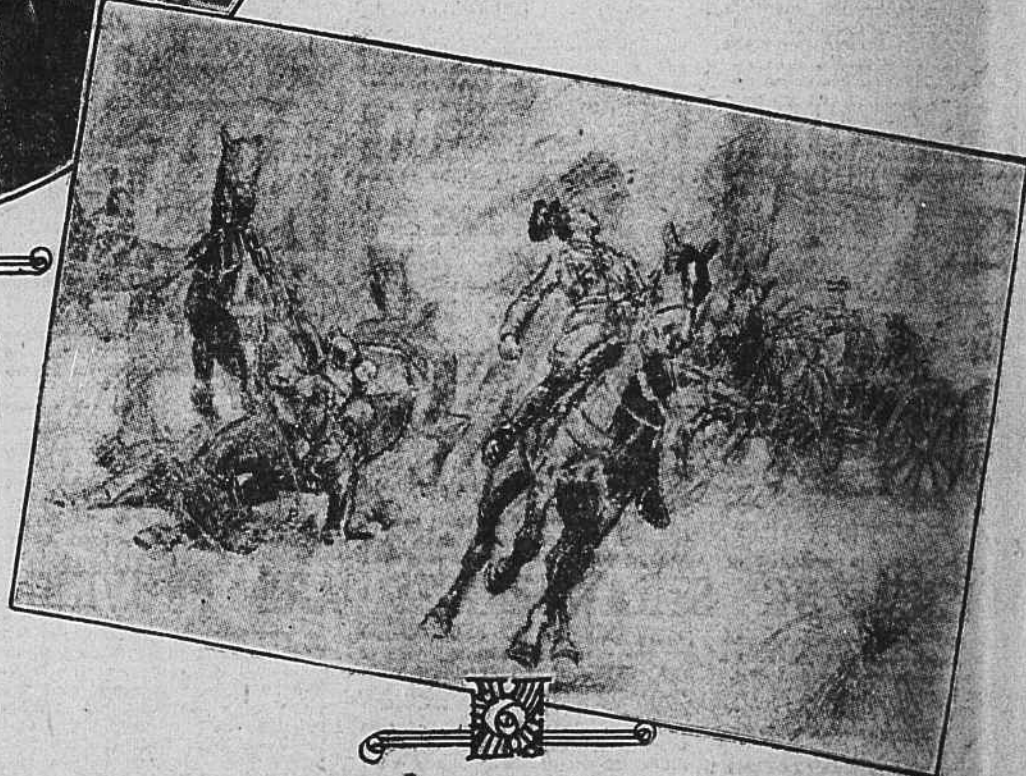
The men were new to fighting, however, and they were not on the firing line. They had to sit idly back of the main firing line while the Southerners were attacking their lines.

Just then a big cannon shell burst above their heads. The captain dodged with the rest, bringing out a big laugh from the re-

recruits, most of whom were not very well disciplined and had little respect for the greatness of their commanding officer.

"Dodge the big ones," the captain shouted, as he admitted that even the seasoned men sometimes dodge at an unexpected shot. It is the unexpectedness of the shooting that causes the men to dodge. When they become used to the noise of battle they can sleep right through a bombardment without being troubled. They fight and sleep in a sort of a daze. Often they are on duty for so long that they cannot go to sleep when the fighting is over, but they sit in a stupor, not knowing what to do.

Sometimes it requires more heroism to stand under fire than at other



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